

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

SHIFTING GEARS PROJECT  
NORTH ADAMS

**INFORMANT: CATHERINE O'NEILL**  
**INTERVIEWER: ALEXANDRA GLOVER**  
**DATE: MAY 26,**

**A = ALEXANDRA**  
**C = CATHERINE**

**SG-NA-T036**

A: The subject is Catherine O'Neill. My name is Alexandra Glover. It's May 26th. I'll be speaking to Mrs. O'Neill from her home in North Adams for the project, Shifting Gears, the changing meaning of work in Massachusetts.

C: Do you have enough room there?

A: Oh yeah, oh yeah. All set. Um, you started to tell me about the beginning of Sprague.

C: Well when I first started, like I say I was working in uh, in the tie factory down on Ashland Street. And then Sprague's came to town and I figured well, now is the time to make a change. So that was about 1930. And I was still single at the time. So I went up there to apply for a job, and I got one. But when they first came there was two shifts. One was at five o'clock in the morning. And I lived two blocks down from here. Five o'clock in the morning till two-thirty. And then the second shift was two-thirty to eleven. [A: oh wow!] And we had to change. One week we worked days, the following week we worked nights. So when I was on the five o'clock shift, I had to get up four o'clock in the morning and hike from way down, two blocks down there, all the way to the corner of Union Street. Do you know where Union Street is?

A: I don't know where it is, no.

C: Do you know where McDonald's is?

A: Oh yes, yeah.

C: All right. Right at that corner there. And somebody would pick us up, or the bus and would take us up to Beaver, that's where they came, and they started up at the Beaver first. [A: wow!] So by waiting at the corner for the bus, usually the help, other help would pick us up and we'd go

up there and we'd work until, like I say, two-thirty. And then two-thirty, and then the second shift would come on. But we only worked about four weeks at a time and then we got layed off. [A: oh wow!] Yup. And then we were out maybe a couple of weeks, two, three weeks, and then they'd call us back. We were only getting twenty cents an hour. Twenty cents an hour when Sprague's first came to town. I worked forty-eight hours a week for nine dollars and sixty cents.

A: It doesn't seem possible.

C: That was the wages. And they, they kept that up and they were just going downhill. And I thought oh now this place is really going to fold up you know, but then came the war. And that's what boosted the Sprague's up and saved them. [A: Hm] And after that they, during the war they made money galore. And they started to hire all of these bigshots, engineers, and (--) Because before that there was just the small help there, the ordinary people. But then when they started to hire all the white collar and paid them high wages, you know, well that lasted for quite awhile. And then after little by little they started to give us a little raise, because they put us on bonus. And um, we made a little more money. But uh, after that it seems like, well uh, then when I was there I went from one department to another. [A: Umhm] Because I'd get layed off from one department and when I got called back I'd go into another. So I think all and all I think I worked in about four different departments. [A: Wow!] Yeah, yeah.

A: Way back at the beginning were you originally from this area? Were your grandparents?

C: Oh yeah.

A: Parents from this area?

C: Yeah. Oh yes. I've always lived (--) I was born in Utica, New York, but I came here when I was only about four years old I guess, because I started school here in North Adams. Yeah.

A: Which school did you go to?

C: Went to Johnson. [A: Umhm] Johnson School, that's just right up here above the hill. And uh, then after, then, then, then I got married and I was still working in Sprague's, in '34.

A: Can I ask you how old you were?

C: When I got married?

A: When you got married?

C: Twenty.

A: Twenty.

C: I was twenty years old when I got married. Yeah. Because that's when I was still there and

got married. And then about four years later I had my son. And then of course, then the war was on then. And I had to get out of Sprague's, because I couldn't work days. So what I did, then they had a, they opened a plant down here on Brown Street. So then I got a job down here working nights. So I worked nights down there all during the war. [A: Wow!] So then when the war ended they wanted me to still stay there and work days, but I couldn't. Because my son was only five years old and he was just starting school. And I, how was he going to get ready to go to school. He couldn't tell time, or anything. So I said, no, I just can't do that. So then I, I got out of there. And I got a job in a store where I can go at 9:00. He'd go to school and I, I would uh, go to work. So that's how I got out of Sprague's. And I never went back after that. But I did work from 1930 until after the war in Sprague's. I went from the Beaver to Brown Street, and I worked there.

A: Wow. [C: Yeah] How did you meet your husband? Was that involving at Sprague?

C: No, no. No, he worked in a shoe shop. We had shoe shops. [A: Umhm]] We had one on Brown Street, one on Union Street. And he worked in both places. [A: oh wow!] And that's how I met him. And uh, we got married in '34.

A: And now before you went to Sprague's you said you were working in a tie factory?

C: Tie factory.

A: What were you doing there?

C: Uh, I was pressing the ties. See they were, they had men there that were cutting out the ties and then the other, they had girls there that were putting linings in them and turning them around and getting them all ready. And then we'd pick them up and we'd press them. We had a form, and we put the form in the tie and we press them.

A: Were you living at home then?

C: Oh yes, yeah. I wasn't married then.

A: Oh yeah. You stayed home right until you got married, then move out.

C: Oh yeah, and then moved out. Yeah, umhm.

A: Yeah. [C: Yeah, umhm] And then, now was it mostly women doing the pressing and men doing the cutting, or was it all mixed?

C: Yeah, the men, the men were doing the cutting, and the girls were shaping them. And then the girls were pressing them. Yes, it was all the girls. The men did the cutting. [A: Umhm] Yeah, they had, put them on the table by the stacks of material, and they had an electric cutter, and they put the pattern on the cloth and they would cut them with the electric cutter. [A: Hm] Yeah, it was (--)

A: How did you feel about that work?

C: I liked it all right. Yeah. It was okay, but uh, I'll tell you, then it wasn't, they didn't have no minimum wages. You got paid what you made. If you made fifty cents a week, that's what you got. [A: Wow] And if you made ten dollars, that's what you got. And it was right after that, then we left and went to Sprague's. And then they had minimum wages. But before that, they didn't. I, before that, when I was going to school I worked up at the Hoosic Carton during the summertime, and I was doing a little job there. And that was the same way. If I made fifty cents a week, that's all I got. And I'd have to be there all week long. [A: Wow!] Yeah. Yeah, that was really bad. That was bad. Yeah. Because uh, no minimum wage. You know, it was rough. Well if you'd excuse me a minute I'll go and get you some coffee, okay?

A: Sure.

[Tape shuts off momentarily]

A: Um, you had started to say something. Now Sprague came in in '30. And what attracted you to make you go over and work there?

C: Well I needed a job, see. So, and uh, I figured well gee, this ought to, this place is new and it ought to be good. And I knew that where I was working in the tie factory, that wasn't going to last much longer. So I just wanted to (--) And another thing too, like I say, when I was working down at the tie shop, you know, there was no minimum wage. [A: Yeah] We got what we made. But when Sprague's came in, even though they were only paying twenty-cents an hour, at least I was sure you know, of getting a pay. And I had to work forty-eight hours to get nine dollars and sixty cents. I'll never forget it. I have never forgotten that. [A: Hm] No. But then I remember when we first, well it was nice in a way when we got our pay, because there was, you got your pay and there was nothing on the envelope. No taxes, no insurance, no withholding of any kind. It was great! And then I can remember when uh, uh, the first time that they gave a raise and I was, we were on group bonus. And uh, and I got my pay that week and got a twenty dollar bill. Oh, I said, oh, I felt like a millionaire.

A: Now what was the group bonus?

C: Uh, the group bonus, it, that was uh, there was about oh I think there was ten of us sitting at this table. And they uh, we had to roll foil and make it nice and flat so they can put it on the machine and roll it, you know, make condensers.

A: Do you know, remember what the title was called?

C: No, I don't think they had any title to that. It was just smoothing out the foil. [A: I see] So that the girls that got that after we did, they were rolling condensers by hand. Big condensers. And when I was, my first job there, they had, we were rolling smaller condensers on a machine, see. But these here were rolled by hand. They were big ones. And I remember my first pay on that job, twenty dollars. I said, oh, I felt like a millionaire. Yeah.

A: You had said when we had this off that when you were living at home there were eight of you?

C: Eight of us at home.

A: And you were all working and helping out the family were you?

C: No, we were all going to school. [A: You were going to school] We were all young. Yeah, yeah. We were young. My sister was still in high school, she was the oldest. I was next to the oldest. And then I went two years to high school and then I didn't like it. And that's when I got out and got the job. And oh my mother was wild. My father could have killed me for leaving school, but I was never one for school. I just hated it. So I went out and I worked.

A: Was that money your own when you brought it home, or did you help out the family?

C: No, we had to help out in the family. Yes. And then one by one, see after I got married, then my other sister, she went to work for awhile and she helped out. Then when she got, then the other one stepped in. So that's the way it was done, you know. Because they [unclear]. And my father, he was a carpenter, and he only worked in the summer. Come winter time you know, there was no work. [A: Oh wow!] So it was rough, it was rough.

A: That is hard.

C: Yeah. Yeah, it was hard. Yeah. But then after I got out of Sprague's I went in the store. I've stayed in that store for thirty years. That's why I, that's why now we have a Sprague union you know. That anybody that's retired from Sprague's join the union. And of course I joined. I belong to it. And I've had, I've had so many people say to me, how come you belong here, you never worked in Sprague's. I said, well I certainly did. Long before you ever worked in Sprague's. Yeah. But I enjoyed working in the store. And I only went in there part time. And I says, well see, when my son had just started school, I says, well I'll work just part time. Friday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, that's all. Well I only did that for two weeks, and then they wanted me to work a little more and a little more. And then before I knew it I had a steady job and I stayed there thirty years. I just retired about seven years ago from Penney's. [A: Wow] Yeah, umhm.

A: Your uh, your first job then at Sprague was rolling out the foil. What kind of (--)

C: No. My first job at Sprague(--)

A: That wasn't the first job?

C: It was rolling on the machine.

A: Oh the machine.

C: Machine, rolling condensers on the machine. [A: Right] And I hated it because it was

bonus. And oh, I'll tell you it was hard. I didn't like it. But then from there I went to rolling the foil. [A: I see] And then from there I went into the resistors. I liked that, working on (--)

A: Why?

C: Well I was testing. The resistors were already made. They were little things and we tested them on the machine. I did that all during the war. I loved it. And then I worked in the gas mask too before that. We had the army came in and they put in gas masks. And I worked there for quite awhile. And then I went into the resistors department. And that's the one I liked the best. That was testing.

A: Why was it different?

C: Well it was testing the resistors you know, it wasn't making them. They were already made and I'd put them on the machine and see if they were good or bad. And I liked that, that was good.

A: What was the environment like when you were there?

C: Well it was all right. It was good. I, well when I first worked in the rolling, we worked for a woman boss which I wasn't too fond, rather work for a man any day. Of course all the help you know, the bosses, they all came from Quincy with the plant you know. [A: Oh] Oh yeah, they, and they brought a lot of their own help too you know.

A: How did you feel about that?

C: Well it wasn't that great. You know, they catered to them before they catered to us. And then the ones that they liked from here became pets, you know how it is, and the others took a back seat. But most all the bosses came from Quincy. Yeah.

A: Now was it normal to have a woman boss?

C: Oh yes. They had a lot of woman bosses. Yeah, yeah.

A: What level, and then were there people over them that were management?

C: Uh, yes. Yeah. There was uh, they'd have a man over them. But they had the run of the place. They were the boss and they ran that department. Oh yeah. They had quite a few of them. Yeah.

A: What was it about her that, that first one that rubbed you the wrong way?

C: Well she's from town here. She wasn't you know, she came from Quincy. [A: Oh] But uh, [A: unclear] I never, she had pets, you know. And I couldn't see that. So that's why I was glad I got out of that department. And then after that I (--) Well yes, when I was working in the resistors they had a woman boss there and she was fair. But I worked nights so she wasn't

around. So I, I was my own boss then. [A: Hm] But uh, the, the boss over her was a young fellow and he was very nice. He was from town here. He was nice.

A: So what changed? When, for your life, when you went from the tie factory to Sprague the money changed. What else changed, made a big difference?

C: Well I liked the job. And it was better. I liked my job down at the tie shop. But uh, like I say, if the money was there I would have stayed. I would have stayed there too, because I really liked it there. But that's why I really made the change is for the money part, you know, after all. [A: Yeah] I wanted to work where I could get some money, because that's what I was after. [A: Oh yeah] You know.

A: What was a, what was a typical day like? You're going to get up, the early shift?

C: You went to work and like I say, when I first worked there it was bonus and you had to stay right there on your machine, because if you didn't make the rates you were the first one to get layed off. And it was hard. I had done a lot. I had bonus job anyways, because you have to keep steady, steady, steady. And I find that if I'm on day work and don't have to worry about making a quota, that I could go even faster and work better. But if you have that quota to make and you know you got to make it, and you try so hard, everything goes wrong. You know? [A: Yes] Nothing goes right. [A: yes (chuckling)] Now like when I was working in the resistors I was on day work. And there I was working and working. And I could see the card from the day shift, how much they made. Gee, my figures were way over theirs. [A: Hm] And their, I was taking my time and I had a lot of time to myself for, for breaks, and I didn't have to rush. [A: Wow] See, but the other way, when you're on bonus it was terrible. [A: Hm] I didn't like that at all.

A: How many breaks did you get? And there's a lunch break too?

C: Well when we first started uh, I don't know if there, there wasn't any breaks. There wasn't even when I started in the store there was no such a thing as coffee break. No coffee break until I had been in there uh, oh, maybe about five years or so. And then this other fellow came in that was assistant manager, and he was more modern. And he said gee, he says um, this is not right. This is against the rules. He said, they're suppose to have a break. So then we got a break in the morning and one in the afternoon. A fifteen minute break, which there, I worked for five, six years without a break. Didn't know what a break was like.

A: You could leave your machine and (--)

C: No. If you left your machine and you got behind, [A: you're in trouble] because half of the time the girls that even go, take time out to go to the ladies room, no, you couldn't, because you'd go behind. And then you try to get caught up and everything would go wrong with the darn machine. And oh! So I'll tell you it was rough. It was rough. I don't like bonus. [A: No] No, I don't like bonus at all. Even when I worked in the store you know, we were on bonus. We had a quota to make and, and it was dog eat dog. It was terrible. And the day they told us that they were going to do away with it I said, oh, thank god. That's the best thing I have ever heard. Gee

it was terrible. I think I have a little more coffee. Want me to warm yours up?

A: Um, lunch. You had half an hour, or an hour? Do you remember?

C: Three uh, three quarters of an hour I think it was. Yeah, three quarters of an hour for lunch. Umhm.

A: Would you pack it and bring it?

C: Well we had a cafeteria there. So we used to go and (--) At first before they started, yes, we packed a lunch and take it. But then they opened up a cafeteria and it was nice.

A: Would you have the same lunch time as other people you worked with [unclear].

C: Uh, no. There was I think three of them. One was at uh, well in the day shift you were working days, I think there was one lunch time at uh, half past eleven and one at quarter to twelve, and one at twelve o'clock. [A: Umhm] The three lunch times, yeah.

A: Would you try and plan it to take it with any friends, or?

C: Oh yes. We'd all go out together, you know, [A: I see] and the group and we'd eat together and then come back.

A: Did you meet a lot of people when you started work there that you hadn't known before?

C: No, it was all people from North Adams, so we all knew one another, yeah. But the ones that came from out of town, you know, we met them and some we made friends. But it was all mostly everybody that I knew. Well the small town, everybody knows everybody around here.

A: Yeah. And you saw them outside of work sometimes?

C: Oh yes, I had. Some, some of them, some of the girls we got closer and then we stayed together. You know, we went out together and I still see them. [A: Hm]

A: Did you have to learn different skills when you went job to job?

C: Oh yes! Every, every department was different. Like when I left one, the first department, which was the rolling department, I had to learn there. And then when I went, and uh, the table and taking uh, smoothing the foil, you had to learn that. And then when I went from there down to the mask, gas masks, you had to learn that job. And then when I went into the resistors I had to learn that. Oh yeah, you have to learn all of those jobs, because you can't just go from one job to another and sit down and do it. No, even today I mean you couldn't do that. [A: No, oh no] Somebody has to teach you. Yeah, even when I went in the store somebody had to teach me to run the register and to do what had to be done. Yeah, you have to learn. That's what I say. You know these jobs that you pick up in the paper and they said, help wanted here and there, experience. Well that's ridiculous! How are you going to be, how are you going to be

experienced if you've never worked there before. Somebody has got to show you what to do?

A: That's the question.

C: Yeah. That's what gets me, experience. How in the world you going to get it.

A: So you were married in thirty-four. [C: Umhm] And you just, you knew your husband in town before you went to Sprague?

C: Yup. Yeah, I met him in uh, in 1930. But I knew him, because he lived here. In fact he was our neighbor and I knew him. Then we went out for four years. And then after that we got married.

A: Wow, that's a long time.

C: Yeah, uh huh. Yeah.

A: How did things change now? You're married and you're living in an apartment, or you had a home?

C: When I first got married? [A: Yeah] No, we were renting. We had a four room apartment. Stayed there for ten years. [A: Wow] And after I had my, when my son was five years old, then we came down here. We bought this place and we've been here ever since. [A: Oh wow] Yeah, umhm.

A: What was it like at home after you got married, when you were still working. How did the work affect [unclear] at home?

C: At home?

A: Yeah.

C: Well like I say, one of the others took over, my other sister. She went to work and she helped out. And then she got a boyfriend and she got married. And uh, and then the other one took over, you know.

A: It kept going.

C: That's the way it was.

A: Hm. When you first had your son did you take off time? Could you?

C: Yeah, oh yeah! But uh, oh, let me see. It wasn't like today you know. You take a leave of absence, you go back and you can have your job. Because if you left, well you had lost your job too. [A: wow!] Sure. Then when you decided to go back you had to apply all over again and take whatever, if they had any opening where you left, okay, otherwise they'd put you in another

department. Yeah, it was, it is, it wasn't(--) Things have changed. They're not, today they're altogether different. [A: Hm] Boy I'll tell you, some of the things that they do today, they're way, way out. Now like when I started to work in the store, like I say, there was nothing like a coffee break. Today the kids come in, the first thing they ask you, when is coffee break? Oh my god. I'm telling you, they over did it so. And then they'd come in and they'd just hang around with their arms folded and wait for a customer to come in, and while you did all the dirty work. I got so fed up that I said, I just can't take this anymore. So I quit. No.

A: Hm. Were you nervous about losing your job when you got, when you got pregnant?

C: No, no. Because I figured when I got ready to go back I could get another job, you know. So.

A: How long did you stay?

C: I stayed out uh, well I think I stayed out a couple of years. And then in between that uh, I had odd jobs, like working in the different stores, just on the weekend, because I had to kid to take care of, you know? It was hard to get a babysitter that you could trust. But then after, like I say, during the war when uh, uh, they opened up down here, all I had to do was go across the street. And I went there and I asked for a job nights. And it worked out fine, because I went in at 2:30 and my husband came home at 4:00. And there was a little girl next door that uh, well my son was to come out of school I think quarter to four. So he wasn't alone. He was with her maybe about a half hour. Then he'd come home at four and he would take over. It worked out fine. [A: That's nice] So I stayed there all during the war. Yeah, I really liked the night shift. And I didn't mind working nights. And I didn't have far to walk. I could walk home because all I had to do was cross the street right here on Brown Street, and I was here. Because we had moved here at the time. And I didn't (--) Because we were living further up on [unclear] Avenue when um, when I first started. But then after when it was time for my son to go to school, all he had to do was go up the path here and he was up here at Johnson School. And all I had to do was cross the street to go to work. And it was great!

A: So he went to the same school you did?

C: Yup, oh yes. Yeah, just right up the path up there and that's it. You follow the path up there a little ways and you're on the top of the hill, and there's Johnson School right across the street. So it worked out good.

A: That's nice. So all through the thirties you're still working at Sprague's. [C: Yeah, umhm]. Were things changing?

C: A little at a time they did. Oh yes, it was big changes. It was changes in the wages and change in personnel. And then when you went from one department to another, there was, you were working with a different group of people. It was, well little by little, yes. And like I say, when I first went in there it was only just a plain ordinary helper. Then after during the war they got people to come in, big engineers and technicians. [A: Wow] Oh yes, they hired all of them. And even from overseas they had a lot of foreigners that came in. Oh yes, they changed an

awful lot during the war, yeah. And I think that's what happened in the years just before Sprague's went out. They had too many white collar men that were getting high wages. And instead of laying them off, they picked on the little ones. And that didn't do any good, because I mean you take for instance my salary didn't compare to the engineers. You know, so it didn't do any good. So then after awhile I guess they got smart and little by little they started to lay off the white collar men. And when they did there they had one great big lay off where they layed off quite a few of them, and they lost their jobs. They had good job. [A: Wow] And a lot of them now, they transferred them out of town you know, and they had homes and families and everything. But they had to sell out and go.

A: That was after the war?

C: Oh yes. That's just recently. Maybe about what? Five years, five, six years? Yeah, yeah. They all got transferred out. Yeah. They had good jobs. They all lost their jobs. So I don't think there's that many white collar jobs left down, down on the [Curran?] high way right now. No.

A: How much uh (--) I checked the length. How much concern or talk was there about health or safety problems even right in the beginning? Was there any?

C: Well I never heard anything said about safety. I don't think anybody ever thought of anything. And no, nothing was said. No.

A: Anyone ever get hurt on the job?

C: Well not that I remember. No, I don't think so.

A: You weren't working at anything dangerous with those big machines?

C: No, no. No, there was nothing that I know of. No. Of course now I don't know what's going on, or after I left I don't know. But I don't think there really was anything dangerous, too dangerous in Sprague's. I don't think so.

A: Because that comes to be a big factory issue now you know.

C: Um.

A: That's why. What was the, what was the hardest thing you did at Sprague's in terms of the work? You said you didn't like the first couple of jobs.

C: I didn't like the first job I had, the rolling. I hated it.

A: And that was because of the bonus?

C: Yeah, the bonus, and, and the machines. To me I don't know, those girls sat at those machines and they were, they were a wiz at it. I could never manage it.

A: Was it real loud?

C: No, no, no. It was very silent. It was a small machine. And it had a roll of foil and a roll of tissue paper. I think there was two rolls of tissue paper and two rolls of foil on this end. And you had to pull them through, and they had to stay together. And you put them on, around a mandle, a mantel. And it was electric. And then you'd wind it up. Put your foot on the peddle and wind up. And I could never get those things together. The foil had to stay in place, and the paper had to stay in place. I don't know, you had to adjust the machines. I wasn't good at it. I hated it.

A: Do you run, and you run it with your foot?

C: Yeah. There was a peddle. You just press the peddle and it would roll by itself. [A: Um] And you'd have to, they had a little clock on it, you'd have to watch. You know, if you had to go over twenty, roll twenty times, well when the clock got to twenty you had to stop it. And then you'd tear it off and you'd seal it. And take it off and then start a new one. [A: Hm] And I never cared for it. No, that was the worst job I had in there. Oh and then I soldered and I didn't like that either.

A: You soldered?

C: I soldered.

A: Which department was that in?

C: That was in, in the soldering department. After the condenser was made we had to twist it on a, on a hot plate and solder it. And it made your fingers so sore I hated it. I didn't stay there very long, because I can't. It made my hands so sore that I couldn't, I couldn't do it.

A: Hm. Do these jobs pay different just for the job? I mean you said there was no money because of the time.

C: Uuh, no. I don't think so. I think we got so much an hour.

A: Umhm, no matter what.

C: No matter what, but then the bonus rates were different. [A: I see] That's where they made their money, yeah. Say now like for instance if they paid say fifty cents an hour, well you, a forty hours a week you got that. But then you were on bonus. And all that you made over that, well that was that much more in your pay. And if you didn't make it, you didn't, you didn't get it, see.

A: Did you ever feel (--) You don't have to get personal about anyone. Did you ever feel that there was sort of tension between the bosses who were either right over you, or the much higher-ups, and you all who were just doing all the work?

C: Well there, there was a (--) I'll tell you, we used to have a man come in that they called a

systemizer. And he, he'd rate you. And he'd watch you, you know. And if he thought that uh, now like you were on bonus. And if he thought that you were going quite fast and you were making quite a bit of bonus, then after when he went and checked with the big shot, then he'd, they would cut you down. So we all, when we saw him coming we'd kind of slow down. But you weren't fooling them. He, he could tell. [Chuckles] He could tell. But that's, that's, I hated that. When they'd come around and time you. A time keeper, that's what it was, see. And [clock chimes] uh, they had that.

A: And he'd sit right next to you and (--)

C: Well he'd watch you. He's stand in the back and he'd watch. And he'd make you nervous. And before you know it your rates would be higher. Yeah. That's about the only thing, but outside of that, if you did your work the bosses never bothered you.

A: What kind of things would get them upset?

C: Who, the bosses?

A: Yeah.

C: No, I don't think I've ever seen any of them get upset, because everybody (--) At that time you know, it was hard to get a job. And if you got a job, well you did your job. And, and they never bothered you. If they thought that you were slacking down on the job, well when they had a lay off you were the first one to get it. They never said anything, but they'd lay you off, and that's it. So uh, I mean they, otherwise they never bothered you.

A: Had most of them been regular workers in the beginning? Or did they, you said they all came with the plant. So did they all just (--)

C: What do you mean the (--)

A: Bosses?

C: The bosses? Yeah, most of them did. They came from uh, with the plant, but them when they got here they hired more local.

A: Oh. [C: Yeah] And those people had already worked in any kind of factory, or they just hired them right off?

C: No, they just hired them. And they, they taught them the job. And that was it. Because they, after you know, after they were here awhile and they, they grew, and they grew bigger, you know, then they had to have more help, so they had to hire the local help. And uh, and they broke them in. And they were okay.

A: Did you ever think of trying to go for one of those jobs?

C: Well I had one during the war.

A: Tell me about it.

C: I was a super, I was a supervisor during the war for uh, uh, what department was that in? I don't know, but on the night shift. [A: Huh!] yeah, on the night shift. Yeah, I was supervisor. Yup.

A: What did you (--) How many people did you watch over?

C: Oh there, we must have had about at least ten anyways. Ten, if not a few more. Yeah. Oh yeah! See what I had to do was see that, of course it was bonus, and I wasn't working, I was just watching. And when they ran out of material I had to go and get the material and give it to them. Make sure that they kept going, you know. Like that. That's what the job was, but it was nice. I liked it. It was easy.

A: Hm, better than doing the other job?

C: Yeah, better than working on production. [Chuckles] Yeah.

A: Was that the last thing you did before you left Sprague?

C: Uh, no, my last job was working in the resistors downstairs..

A: That was the last one.

C: Yeah. Testing the resistors, because then the war ended. And he wanted me to stay, but I had to work days. And I had to be in there for seven o'clock in the morning and I just couldn't do it. Because I had my son and I said, I can't do it. I said I could do it if I could come in a little later after he went to school, but they said no, because the job had to be started at seven o'clock and get some ahead so that you know, you could pass it down to the others. I couldn't do it. So I had, that's when I got out of Sprague's all together.

A: Because, because you had to be with your son?

C: Yeah, because I couldn't uh, they didn't have no more night shift. [A: Oh] And I had to go on days, and I couldn't because of the day shift was seven o'clock in the morning. And I just couldn't make it. So I said, well, then the best thing for me to do is just quit. So that's why, because if it wasn't for that I would have stayed in Sprague's. Yeah I would have. I would have stayed there, but just couldn't do it.

A: So right at the beginning of the war they began to change. You know, they needed to fill more jobs? That happened right away?

C: Yeah. Oh yes, they had a lot of work and a lot of government work. Yeah, they brought in uh, they made gas masks. And they made a lot of resistors and condensers for, for different

things for the war, you know. Airplanes and the boats, and things like that. They had a lot of work. They kept busy all during the war. Yeah, yeah. And that's why I say that's what saved Sprague's. And then they even won an award for, when they first came it was Sprague's Specialties, but during the war when they, well they went over their quota on something, I don't know just what it was, but then they won. They had this great big meeting where everybody went. And they gave out the, we all got a little pin, an award. They won a big award and they changed the name to Sprague's Electric. [A: Oh!] That's when they changed the name, because it was always Sprague's Specialties when they first came to town. [A: Hm] Yes, but they changed it during the war.

A: I wonder what year that was?

C: Uh, well when did the war break out?

A: Forty (--)

C: Forty-four. Wasn't it around in the forties? [A: Yup, in that area] Yup, I think it was right about then, yup, yup. They changed it. Sprague's Electric. Yeah.

A: And when that, when the war started they, they opened up different kind of jobs, is that what happened?

C: Uh, yeah, they, they put in more jobs. And the jobs that they had grew. They got bigger, they had more orders. And you know, they had more, lot more work. And like I say, they had so much work that they were hiring just everybody and anybody. [A: Wow!] They were hiring people that had already had jobs someplace else. And if they wanted to work nights they hired them. They were working two jobs, or they were even hiring married women, older women, because I know my mother worked there for awhile too.

A: Huh, now why did she start working there?

C: Yeah. Well! [A: Just during the war?] Just, just during the war for a little while. Yes, yup. Because they were hiring everybody. They were, they were looking for all kinds of help, [A: wow!] any hours that you wanted to work.

A: Do you remember what your mother did? Do you know?

C: No, I don't remember just what she did, but she was there for awhile.

A: Wow!

C: Oh they had a lot, oh, the fellows especially. It was mostly the men that were working in different places. And when they got out of work at five o'clock they'd come right over there and work till eleven o'clock. [A: Wow!] They were working two jobs. They were making money. Oh yes! Yeah.

A: Then the women would pretty much do, the married women would pretty much do the night shifts?

C: Uh well, they, both. Uh, they, they had their day jobs, but if they wanted to work nights, they could work nights. And nights and days, whatever. Which ever. You had your choice. If you wanted a job days, you could work days. Like myself, I took the night job, because that was the only time I could work, see? So I was working nights, but I liked it. It was good.

A: Umhm. Did the same people that you had been working with before switch over to nights at the war, so you were working with friends?

C: Uh, uh, no, no. They were all new, new help that uh, because the girls that were working there days, they kept their job. They wanted to work days. Like myself, I would have stayed on days too, but I had no choice. But for the night shift they hired all new help. Sure. Yeah.

A: Wow!

C: Married women with children, you know. That their husbands came home at night and stayed with the kids, and they went to work. It was nice, you know. [A: Umhm] Like their husbands, they were home all day with the kids, and at five o'clock when the husbands came home, then they would go and work. Because they had a five o'clock shift. They had a six o'clock shift. They had a third shift too. You could have gone in at eleven o'clock at night and work till six o'clock in the morning. [A: Wow!] Oh yeah!

A: So there wasn't really the sense of the mothers just totally taking care of the kids, because the husbands would switch off and do it in the night?

C: No, they would do it at night, yes. If they, you know, if they needed a job and they wanted to work it was easy, because fathers would work days, and then the mothers take care of the kids. And then at night they would just switch over. That's what I did. My husband took care of my kid at night, and I went to work. And in the daytime I was home.

A: Would you all come home and have dinner together first, and then you'd go off and (--)

C: Well at night, no, because uh, well we were, he'd come home for lunch and I would be here. And of course my son would come home from school, we'd all be here for lunch. But then for supper I wouldn't be here. He'd get supper. And my son, he and my son would eat and I'd be to work.

A: Was that unusually for him to get supper?

C: Oh no, no. He still does.

A: Hm

C: That's one thing, my husband always got supper. He, he loves to cook.

A: That's wonderful.

C: Yeah, yeah, he does the shopping and (--) Well I'll tell you how that happened. It's because when I was working in the store, I'd work till six o'clock and he got home at four. So if I, if he had to wait for me to get home a six o'clock and start cooking, no way. So he took upon himself to cook. He's been doing it ever since. Yeah, he likes it, you know? Yeah, always cooked. Because the job he had, he worked in a shoe shop and he, they only worked till four o'clock. And he's come home and he'd have two hours before I got home. So he would start the supper and have it all ready. Yup. It worked out good.

A: Hm. The other house chores, were they mostly, you take care of them when? Evenings, or morning, or.

C: Oh well in the morning, yeah. Well I had all morning. I didn't have to go to work till two thirty. [A: Uh huh] So I had plenty of time. And then weekends I'd have Saturday and Sunday, because we didn't work Saturdays. No, the housework was no problem. No problem at all.

A: Was that typical for other families that you know of, to have this sort of real sharing all of the house, the house work. You know, in terms of the cooking or helping out with the kids?

C: Well they had to if they were working nights, and the husband was home taking over. Yeah, they'd have to, you know. But I suppose most of the people that had husband that you know, couldn't, can't even boil water, I imagine that they'd start something and get it ready. And then all they had to do was heat it up. [A: Yeah] Yeah, you know, you have to work that way. Because some men you know, they'd (--) Like my son, he can't boil water. I think he'd starve. So his wife would have to, you know, if she was working at night she'd have to get something ready. Of course today it's a cinch with the microwave. Oh my gosh! You don't have to worry. You get something started in the morning and leave it there. And then at night they can just pop it in there and that's it.

A: Oh uh, of your friends that you know, you sort of contemporaries, people you worked with about your same, your same age, did they, did you find that they really you know, if the husband could cook he would do that, and (-)

C: Yeah, if he could cook he would. Yes.

A: It wasn't unusual your situation?

C: Oh no. No, no. No, no. No, they had to help. I mean if, if you want to work and you have to work. Even today, all right if you have a family and they're both working, when you come home at night he'll have to help. He'll have to do something even if he only sets the table, he's got to. You know, they should help, because she's worked all day. And he has too, but I mean his job is all done. His work is done, but your work isn't. You got to think of supper, and clean up the kitchen. And then if there's housework to do, washing and ironing, you're still going, you know? Where they're all done. [A: Oh yeah] Um, they got it made. Sure.

A: But it was different in this family because they helped out.

C: Well yeah. He, he always did. He never did any housework. He never liked housework. But he always did the cooking. And that's it. Then I had to do the dishes and everything, but at least the cooking, that's a big help, because I don't like to cook. [A: Uh huh] So he always did that. And he did the shopping. He had to do the shopping, because at the time I couldn't drive. [A: Oh!] And you see what I mean, I couldn't go to the market and pick up anything, because I'd have to carry it home. Where he had the car, so he'd go pick it up, put it in the car and bring it home.

A: When did you learn how to drive?

C: Well I learned how to drive, I've been driving now for I don't know, I guess it's almost ten years I guess. Well I learned to drive because at one time my husband got sick. [A: oh yeah] And he was in the hospital and there was the car in front of the house. And I couldn't drive. And I had to depend on this one and that one to take me up. And I said, well now this is ridiculous. So I made up my mind that I was going to end that. So I went down and I got a learners permit, got the book, learned the questions.

A: Did it all yourself.

C: And did it all myself. And then I was start (--) I was funny, I started to learn how to drive with my husband. All we did was fight. [Laughs]

A: Same with the parents.

C: I wasn't, oh I wasn't doing this right. I wasn't doing (--) I says bologne with this. I got fed up. So I went to the phone and I called up the drive instructor. I said I want an appointment and I'm going to go out and learn to drive. Okay. He came down and I went out with him. I think I had about four lessons with him. And then one day he said to me, okay. He says next week you're going out with the inspector. I said, no I'm not! I said, I'm not ready! Oh yes, you're ready. You're going to go. Oh boy, I'll tell you, I had a fit. So that day I had, that morning I went down to the registry and there he was, waiting for me. And uh, I said, well this is it. So then I got in the car, couldn't start the car. Couldn't get it started. I said oh god, I flunked before I started. Come [tape fades out]

end of tape